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AUTHOR Gow, John E.
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ABSTRACT

Four forces are likely to alter the direction of speech education: science and technology, communication research, the rising cost of college education, and the new value system of youth. As a result of these factors, the following changes in speech education are recommended. The "practical public speaking" emphasis should be subordinated to courses which make use of communications research and which are combined with a social sciences perspective. However, the "science syndrome"--adopting scientific terms while retaining a traditional approach--should be avoided. Innovative teaching and examinations methods should be adopted. Peer teaching, course construction by students, and use of tape recorders and film equipment are possibilities. A final oral conference, based on discussion with the instructor of several questions prepared in advance, may be better than traditional written tests. (JK)

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THE NEED FOR NEW-THINK IN THE SPEECH PROFESSION

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by

John E. Cow

Department of Speech and Theater

Elmhurst College

Elmhurst, Illinois 60126

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Without question the speech profession has enjoyed considerable growth since the founding of a national professional organization in 1914. Expansion into areas such as communication research and television makes the future appear equally propitious. However, the central question to be broached here involves priority more than growth, or what should occur regardless of what will occur. Is there a need for teachers of speech to re-evaluate course offerings, so that what is taught reflects the highest professional goals as well as the considerable research of the last 50 years? Is there a need for new directions in teaching, new methodology? I believe that the answer to both questions is yes. Furthermore, the old system needs replacement, not simply repair. The forces which militate against inertia are many and powerful; if we fall short in our response to them, we may become, like Tantalus, ever grasping but never achieving, locked in an academic cultural lag. To appreciate the extent of the need, let us first identify these forces most likely to alter future directions. There are essentially four.

First, science and technology. Their influence is borne out in the use of such instrumentalities as audiotape recorders, film, videotape recorders, television cameras, etc. These have been employed to permit students to see and hear themselves as others do, sharpening their grasp of the rudiments of public speaking. Another aspect has been the increased utilization of scientific methodology

in speech research. Still another dimension, far less salutary, might best be depicted as the "science syndrome." Those afflicted by this malady have been affected by two factors--the desire to be current and the continuing lust for full membership in the community of scholars. The syndrome manifests itself in a "scientizing" of speech, the adoption of techno-scientific terms for speech activities without any accompanying change in one's basic approach. Thus the traditional description of the speaker-audience-occasion-purpose transaction becomes a message encoded by a source, transmitted through a channel, and decoded by a receiver, which in turn produces feedback that restimulates the source.

A second force, perhaps a byproduct of the first, is the emergence of the new "communications" emphasis. It has brought about a confrontation with the more traditional "practical public speaking" approach. The result has been a pedagogical-philosophical rift within the profession. Generally speaking, the "communications" movement approaches the act of speech from a somewhat broader perspective, as a social psychological act with important consequences for the individual and society. From this line of thought it follows that all relevant aspects of the act should be studiously examined. With stress on study, the presentation of classroom speeches plays a subordinate role at best, thus undermining "practical public speaking" objectives. At the university level the battle between the two major factions may be resolved by separation, the communicationists establishing a separate division

of the department or a separate school entirely. On the undergraduate level, however, on small colleges across the country, more often than not traditionalists seem to prevail, to the near exclusion of their rivals.

Another way to discover the tension between the communicationists and the traditionalists is to sample textbooks. For example, the fourth editions of some old standbys have been considerably updated in language and have made honest attempts to incorporate social science research. There are traces of the "science syndrome" as well; yet, they are still, basically, oriented to learning how to give better speeches.[1] An example of a transitional text would be Donald K. Smith's Man Speaking. Seventy-five per cent of the book concentrates on understanding the speech act, and twenty-five per cent on "preparation and action." It largely avoids scientific jargon, perhaps because it does not adequately cover the breadth of social science research bearing on speech. It is a genuinely transitional book, however, because it seeks to give more than equal treatment to comprehension vis a vis practice. In the foreword, Smith states that his observations and experiences with students make him increasingly confident that

> ...a college public speaking course can and should teach more about public speaking than a set of immediate performance skills, and ... that the most fundamental progress toward personal excellence in public discourse is made by students who become interested, not simply in their own personal needs and goals, but in the social and public dimensions of all acts of public discourse.[2]

Conceivably the most radical departure from tradition has been

Borden, Gregg, and Grove's Speech Behavior and Human Interaction.[3] It attempts to thoroughly inform the student on speech as behavior, incorporating a heavy dose of social science research. There are no instructions on how to give a speech. It is a full-fledged effort to instruct students in the nature of the communication process from an enlarged perspective, that of the several social sciences.

The third major force impelling change is represented by external conditions. The economic climate in America is of paramount concern. When higher education must react to inflationary trends and higher costs for consumer goods by sharply raising tuitions, it may be pricing itself out of the market. A recent study conducted for theCarnegie Commission on Higher Education examined the financial stability of 41 colleges and universities. Its findings and weighted projections painted a bleak picture, as this statement signifies:

> Colleges and universities in a healthy financial state, although not rare, are clearly in the minority, and, in fact, their situation is so much at variance with the daily experience of most presidents that some find it hard to believe that such campuses truly exist.[4]

Some states, such as Illinois, have undertaken to assist private colleges, but this may not be sufficient. The economic pinch causes colleges to re-evaluate their whole approach to education, cutting here, re-shaping there, trying to find a formula that can continue to attract able students to their doors. Colleges hope that stimulating new programs will keep them competitive in spite of rising costs. Under pressure for innovative change, the departments which do not creatively respond

may face extinction.[5]

Coupled with economics is another powerful external development which pressures colleges and universities to constantly update their offerings. The so-called "Sputnik effect" spurred Congress to enact legislation designed to improve American education in the wake of palpable advances by the Soviet Union. In the last decade instruction on the high school and grade school levels has been upgraded, and what might formerly have been considered college level courses are now offered to high school students. While there are obviously still shortcomings for many, especially in inner city ghettos, the college-bound student now approaches the campus with an awareness unlike his typical counterpart of pre-Sputnik times. If a college fails to attract or retain today's high school student because of an outmoded program, its days are numbered. As for speech, many high school students have had some taste of public speaking, and if we in speech have little else to offer, we may not survive.

A fourth source of pressure stems from an alleged new value system generated by youth. Rollo May, Charles Reich, and others argue that a new set of values is emerging in America which will replace the materialistic values of the corporate state. Reich in his <u>The Greening of America</u> dubs the alleged new value system Consciousness III, and, as he avers, it "...has up to now been almost entirely a youth movement."[6] The new consciousness gives top priority to the human condition, spurning a life style which stresses consumption, growth, and a com-

petitive lust for status. If the critics are in any sense accurate, then speech courses which in effect teach control and influence of others for status advancement will come under attack. If is difficult to quantify the extent of student disaffection with the education they receive, based on this alleged new value system. But few campuses can say that they have not had student protests (on the war, the condition of the environment, or on the inadequate role students play in academic decisionmaking). New consciousness or not, it is evident that today's student is challenging the worth of societal practices as well as the sacred cows of academia. Academia must be ready with satisfactory answers appropriate to the new campus climate.

The review of forces already causing traumatic conflict and revision suggest that pressures for "new-think" will continue unabated for the foreseeable future. Thus a re-evaluation of offerings as well as a search for new directions is in order. What follows is what I believe to be needed if the speech profession is to satisfy future challenges.

1. The "practical public speaking" emphasis in speech curriculums must be replaced. There will continue to be a need for courses which seek primarily to instruct students on how to give a speech, but this need should be subordinated. Because the act of speech is a variegated phenomenon with historical, sociological, psychological, and anthropological dimensions, it demands thoughtful, integrated analysis. To continue teaching the subject matter field as if "how to" is virtually all that can be or ought to be included is to do it disservice. It

would be like gearing all political science instruction to the level of "how to work a precinct."

2. The course curriculum which should replace the public speaking oriented structure should have a social science foundation. Social sciences have carried out most of the research and experimentation which have enhanced our grasp ofthe significance of speech. Let us recognize that fact and nurture its continuance, aided by our own burgeoning contributions to this fund of knowledge. Typical course titles might be: Psychological Perspectives on Communication, The Sociology of Communication, The Origins of Speech and Man, Politics and Twentieth Century Rhetoric, Cross-cultural and Subcultural Meaning Systems, etc. Courses similar to these are presently taught. When taught under the auspices of speech departments they are found at universities, whose departments still retain a strong stable of public speaking courses. When found in liberal arts colleges at all, they are most often taught by other academic disciplines.

Beyond believing that a social science emphasis is the only professionally responsible one, I also think that student interest in self identity, social conscience, etc., will not pass the scene quickly, as did maxiskirts or hula hoops. The works of Galbraith, Ellul, Goodman, and many other social critics point toward a society of ever more technological complexity, with unprecedented pressures for conformity and the cultivation of massive bureaucracy. Youth in general and college students in particular will likely continue to search for answers to the

problems posed by this new era. The answers they seek are generally pursued in the social sciences. Many of the problems implicate communication; yet the many configurations of "communications" have seldom been treated with the scope, depth, and integration that specialists--the speech profession--could achieve. This fact strengthens my belief that a new curriculum is both desirable and necessary.

3. While opting for a social science bias, speech professionals should not be parasites. They should be wary of the pitfalls inherent in any scientific undertaking which deals with human behavior. The "science syndrome" must be recognized and discarded. More importantly, the efforts of sociologists and psychologists must be utilized but not embraced. Human scientists often fail to take into account that they have the same frailties as the subjects they study. And though scientific data in the phenomena of communication is to be analyzed and appraised, speech professionals must also break new ground. We should pay particular attention to critics like Cicourel and Garfinkel.

4. Innovative teaching and examination practices must accompany the suggested new curriculum; for if new student values are emerging, programmatic revision alone will not suffice. A new curriculum must be taught in such a way that interest and involvement result. For example, third and fourth year students should be able to take courses which they themselves can help construct. I have had students do precisely this with two courses that I have taught; it has given students a greater sense of participation in the learning task. Students are

informed at the first class meeting that a section of the semester's work is to be planned by the class, according to their interests. In a gen - eral semantics class two years ago, this produced a project that sought insight into the inferences and judgments people make about male students with "long" hair. So members of the class devised a questionnaire and set out to interview equal numbers of "long" and "short" haired males. Granted the conclusions were limited by the size and nature of the sample, but the assignment was carried out with much enthusiasm. More important, I think that the first hand experience gave students some real insight into the process of inference.

If we ask students to help construct the courses they take, and if they learn something meaningful from their own efforts, is it too radical to suggest that they might also be encouraged to teach? I am not advising that teachers abdicate the teaching role; but I do believe that if it is shared, the result would be an enrichment of learning for all. I am assuming that active participation in a course is more bene- ficial than passive response, that motivation to learn will increase if the student is treated as a resource with something positive to con- tribute. I have experimented with the concept of student as teacher in only a limited way. Specifically, I have required that upperclass students in classes of persuasion and semantics share their semester projects with their peers in class and be ready to respond to questions concerning these projects. In effect this has meant that students pre- sented "mini" lectures, trying to inform their peers on the results of

their efforts and the implications of these results for their classmates. The projects included an advertising campaign by two students for a small restaurant-night spot, which they reported had more than doubled business from their efforts; another student gave a detailed analysis of the persuasion of the Reverend Jesse Jackson, based in part on her hearing Jackson at a session of Operation Breadbasket; still another student analyzed the advertising on children's television, attempting to assess its potential effects.

Emboldened by the favorable response to student reports, I encouraged the next group of persuasion students to use a whole class period if necessary to achieve a fuller understanding of their efforts; further, I suggested that film or projecting equipment, tape recorders or slide projectors, in these or any other assignments, were available on request. All this equipment have always been available to teachers through the college's audiovisual department, but students are seldom encouraged to use them. One girl did present a film in addition to her project findings. The film, produced by the American Red Cross for the purpose of increasing blood donations, had been used in a campus blood drive. The student for her project had tested the film's persuasive impact on donors. Her report to the class was definitely enriched by our being able to view the film ourselves. Perhaps without being fully aware of it, she was teaching a unit on film as a persuasive instrument. Two other students brought film to bear on their project, comparing and contrasting persuasive technique in "Triumph of the Will,"(a propaganda film from Hitler's Germany of the 30's), and Nixon's "Checkers" speech.

Other presentations in the same class were a slide lecture on the environment (a persuasive speech assignment), an original musical composition entitled "Persuasion" (a "creative" persuasive speech assignment), an illustrated lecture on the changing directions in the advertising program of a large Chicago savingsand loan association (a semester project by students who had worked at the particular savings and loan association). Each of the examples cited, especially the semester projects but several of the classroom speech assignments as well, called for students to instruct their peers in matters pertinent to course content, making them in fact associate teachers of the course. Judging from student comments, they were effective teachers.

What I am promoting here is not novel. McKeachie and others have long held that teaching methods which more actively involve students in the learning process have definite advantages. Most often this point of view has created an increase in the use of discussions as opposed to lectures in classroom procedure. Yet, I am convinced that teachers of speech, and of other disciplines as well, have not fully tapped the range of possibilities toward more student involvement in the learning process. In any event, my modest efforts to encourage students, largely upperclassmen, to assist in the planning and teaching of courses have had some perceptible, positive effects--greater motivation and rapport.

Traditional methods of examination may also need change. Many variations have been used--the take-home final, open book final, etc. I have tried another approach, the final oral conference. It is an

oral "exam" but not quite as ominous as those associated with graduate study. I have employed the following procedure. The student is asked to be prepared to discuss any of ten questions, which are given to him two weeks in advance of the final exam period. Then a conference time is arranged. At conference time, an informal discussion is conducted, based on the selected questions. What ensues from this exchange clearly reveals the student's strengths and weaknesses.

There are shortcomings to the conference approach. Students may be extremely tense in a face-to-face encounter with their instructor. However, those primarily involved would be upperclassmen who can be expected to manage the situation much more satisfactorily than their freshmen counterparts. And success also hinges on the instructor's skill in establishing rapport with his students.

With the quest for identity a much discussed pertinent feature of campus life today, frequent personal conferences for exams and/or other matters would have the potential for renewing a student's sense of being. For he can speak with his professor, one who knows him, his strengths, his failings. Besides facilitating the reinforcement of important course concepts, the conference can enhance the student's self concept, that individual awareness so much threatened in this era of multiversity and mass society.

What is recommended, then, is a basic curriculum stressing the social science dimensions of speech over the more traditional program. In so doing, the speech profession must not merely copy the social

scientist; there are unresolved research problems which demand new and creative solutions from both the social scientists and the new, communications-oriented speech scientists. The "science syndrome" must be avoided. Furthermore, methods of instruction and evaluation should encourage the student to be an active participant in the learning experience. The extent to which the speech profession responds to the irrepressible forces for change will determine its future strength. It can begin to achieve a fuller measure of its potential as an academic discipline. Will it?

Footnotes

[1]Good examples are A. Craig Baird, Franklin H. Knower, and Samuel L. Becker, General Speech Communication (New York, 1971), and Robert T. Oliver, Harold P. Zelko, and Paul D. Holtzman, Communicative Speaking and Listening (New York, 1968).

[2]Donald K. Smith, Man Speaking, a Rhetoric of Public Speech (New York, 1969), viii.

[3]George A. Borden, Richard B. Gregg, and Theodore G. Grove, Speech Behavior and Human Interaction (Englewood Cliffs, 1969).

[4]Earl F. Cheit, The New Depression in Higher Education (New York, 1971), 35.

[5]At my own institution three areas of language teaching are being eliminated. One nearby college reduced its teaching staff by 25% last year, a director of debate being one of the casualties. And another Chicago area college reduced its speech and theater department to theater only. These instances reflect the severe economic pressures being felt across the country.

[6]Charles A. Reich, The Greening of America (New York, 1970), 286.

[7]For a critical analysis of methodological problems see Aaron V. Cicourel, Method and Measurement in Sociology (New York, 1964); for a good (but difficult to read) collection of Garfinkel's communication studies, involving methodological concerns similar to Cicourel, see Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology (Englewood Cliffs, 1967).